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Upon a silk thread?

Relations between the Safavid court of Persia and the Dutch East Indies Company, 1623-1722

Introduction

Those who entered the Persian capital Isfahan in the mid seventeenth century – when it was reported to count nearly a million inhabitants, a number unequalled in any European town – could not fail to be impressed, especially when their journey ended on the *majdan*. The huge rectangular space – 512 by 159 meters – was lined with arcades on two floors. At regular intervals, beautiful trees bordered the square. In front of these, the pavement was broken by a shallow canal demarcating the piazza proper. Marble bridges linked it to the space under the arcades, which contained shops on both floors as well as the entrances to the city's main bazaars. The grand Masjid-i Shah, the royal mosque, stood at the south side. This complex of architecture surrounding trees and water – there were fountains besides the canal – embodied the ideals of desert princes who wanted to turn their cities into an oasis.

At the piazza's west side, the Ali Qapu rose, the great palace gate, tiled in blue and gold, its main door surrounded by green porphyry. To the left and right of it, nine chained lions were kept.¹ Behind it, the Safavid shahs, like their Ottoman colleagues behind the High Porte, received their visitors: lowly subjects, mighty vassal princes and, of course, people from abroad, foreigners, both high-born ambassadors and simple merchants and artisans.² This essay is concerned with a particular group of such merchants – those employed by the Dutch East Indies Company, or VOC – and their relations with the Persian court.

¹ For the palace gate, see Hotz 1908:271.

² Useful introductions to Safavid history are found in Savory 1980, especially chapters 4, 5 and 8, and Morgan 1988, especially chapters 11-15.

Beginnings

In 1623, Hubert Visnich arrived in Isfahan, sent there by the Dutch East Indies Company to sound out the possibilities of a formal commercial relationship. He was instructed to negotiate free trade with Persia, including freedom of all import and export duties.³ Thus, the ruler of Persia, Shah Abbas I (reigned 1588-1629), knew that, after earlier failures to engage the major European powers (Spain, the emperor, the pope) in his battle against the Ottoman enemy, he was given another chance to try and do so with a nation whose interest in his empire was, perhaps, more immediate.⁴ Consequently, in the same year 1623, Abbas granted the VOC a 'favorable conditie totten handel' – 'favourable conditions under which they could trade', that is, a treaty which gave the Company access to the Persian ports and led the Heren XVII to immediately free the monies and goods necessary to implement the new trade.⁵ It was, mainly, silk that tied the knot between the Dutch and the Persians, for Dutch trade in Persia was made dependent on the Company agreeing to annually buy a given amount of silk – a royal monopoly – at a pre-established price;⁶ in return, they not only would be free to trade in other wares, but also be exempted from the more onerous tolls and taxes – or so they thought.

In the same year, Abbas decided to send an ambassador, Musa Beg, to 'the King of Holland' with gifts of silk, precious carpets and turquoises. Though the Heren XVII well realized the shah was concerned more about 'compliments and political affairs than about the Company's trade'⁷ and were rather anxious not to get mixed up in any 'materie van staedt, ofte ons ergens in te ingageren'⁸ – they would take care not to become embroiled in matters of state, or allow themselves to get involved in his affairs – they took good care to make certain that the States General would receive the Persian envoy with all due ceremony. Consequently, Musa Beg, on his arrival in The Hague, was met by the Prince of Orange, with a suite of no less than 36 carriages.⁹ He told Their High Mightinesses that his master wanted nothing less than that the Dutch sever all commercial and political ties with the Ottoman empire, would help him recapture the cities and islands conquered by the Portuguese in the Gulf area and, moreover, should stop trading with

³ Visnich's instruction, dated 27-1-1623, has been published by Dunlop 1930:677-9.

⁴ Old, but for its documentation still valuable is Bayani 1937.

⁵ The capitulations of 1623 and 1629 have been published by Dunlop 1930:679-82.

⁶ For a succinct analysis see Floor 1996:323-68.

⁷ According to the resolutions of the States General, 8-4-1626: 'complimenten ende politieke saecken, als om haere negotie' (Dunlop 1930:692).

⁸ Dunlop 1930:157, no. 79.

⁹ Dunlop 1930:195, no. 101, XVII to Visnich, 4-8-1626. For the resolutions of the States General concerning the mission of Musa Beg see Dunlop 1930:687-720.

the many Armenians who, actually, were the most successful middlemen between the economy of his empire and the West; instead, the Dutch would deal with merchants approved by him, only.¹⁰

Obviously, the States General were unwilling to compromise their commercial and political interests in the Mediterranean by entering into the first and last proposal. As to the first, less than completely honestly, but very politically they answered Abbas that the consuls in the Ottoman empire were the private employees of the Dutch merchants trading therein. However, if the Ottomans continued to hamper Dutch trade, these merchants would of course be only too glad to turn to the protection of the Persians. About the Armenians: not a word – perhaps because the Dutch hoped the shah would understand this to be a ‘private’ matter, too.¹¹ Nevertheless, in later years, when trade with Persia had established itself, the Company noted that the export of Persian wares – including large quantities of silk – via Aleppo and the Armenian merchants, was detrimental to their own position on the European (silk) market; hence, they ordered their representatives to at least try and ‘divert’ the Persian traders in their own direction.¹²

While all this must have been disappointing to the shah, his second proposal was warmly welcomed indeed: the States General wrote they would gladly join him in any policy that would lead ‘tot afbreuck van syne ende onse vianden’, – that would harm his and our enemies – for the Twelve Years’ truce had just ended, and Spain and Portugal again were at war with the Dutch. Moreover, they would immediately order their representatives, that is the VOC, to enter into the necessary details.

Thus, relations between Persia and the VOC were opened. A few years later, the States General, by way of Governor-General J.P Coen, sent one Jan Smid to Isfahan, to negotiate the continuation of the first contract. Of course, for the Persians he was the ‘ambassadeur van den grooten coninck van Hollant’, ‘the ambassador of the great king of Holland’, the Prince of Orange. Setting off from Batavia in 1628, on his arrival in Persia in 1629 Smid found that Abbas had died, and that his grandson, Safi I (reigned 1629-1642) had taken his place. The new shah – or, rather, his senior officials – ordered that the Dutch envoy and his suite be received with all regards, admonishing them ‘that they should make merry and enjoy themselves to

¹⁰ Dunlop 1930:697, 699-700, ambassador Musa Beg to the States General, 11 and 18-6-1626.

¹¹ Dunlop 1930:707-8, States General to Shah Abbas, 26-9-1626.

¹² Dunlop 1930:619, no. 299, XVII to the governor-general, 25-3-1637.

¹³ This and the following quotes by Smid from Smid’s report over the period 26-7-1628 – 14-6-1630, Dunlop 1930:729-61: ‘dat vroolijck souden sijn en goet chyer maecken’; ‘somma: vernamen hier weynich grootsheyt off konincklijcke magnificientien’; ‘plomp en rouw naer der Persiaenen aert, die de oude Parthen ten deelen noch verthoonen’.

the full'.¹³ To this end, the shah gave the VOC-embassy a seemingly royal allowance – seemingly, because the Dutch soon realized they had to spend a considerable part of it in gifts to those officials who were to help them advance their cause.

When he finally was received in audience, Smid bowed over the shah's hand, as if kissing it, while his men did actually touch the hem of the royal robe with their lips, to symbolize the ancient Persian foot kiss. Afterwards, watching the king conversing with his musicians and play with 'little apples' and, all the while, drinking heavily, Smid clearly was disappointed by the casualness of the reception: 'in short, we did not see or hear anything smacking of grandeur here or what pertains to royal magnificence'. Even two royal toasts, to the health of the Prince of Orange, could not improve his impression. The food at the banquet that followed, though served in huge golden dishes, he considered 'boorish and rude, according to the Persian character, that still partly shows the ways of the ancient Parthians'. He was more impressed by the array of bejewelled bowls, goblets and vessels set out in the various palace galleries. At subsequent feasts, Smid was only mildly surprised to see the king enter totally drunk, nor by the fact that nothing of consequence was achieved during these parties. However, he was a little upset by the dancing of 'whores and sodomite youngsters, hired for the occasion'.

Political problems – an Ottoman attack –, court intrigues, communications mismanagement, but also Company in-fighting between the resident VOC-official, Visnich, and ambassador Smid, contributed to the less than felicitous feelings with which the latter left the Persian capital. Yet, the renewal of the 1623-treaty was negotiated by Visnich in 1629 and confirmed in the letters that Safi's officials sent to the Prince of Orange and the States General in 1630. However, a proper comparison between the conditions agreed upon in 1623 and the 1629-ones would have taught the Company that their erstwhile freedom had been much curtailed. There was, perhaps because the tolerant Abbas had died, no more talk of being allowed to build their own chapels, and efforts to convert their non-European servants to Christianity were most expressly forbidden. Moreover, another item that, for the future, was far more serious, now stood out absolutely clear: any suggestion of freedom of customs' duties that might have existed in the first capitulations – admittedly, based mostly on wishful reading by the Dutch – was clearly eliminated from the second. Nevertheless, the capitulations of 1629 were the basis of a Dutch-Persian relationship that was to last for nearly a century. It is my purpose to establish their mutual expectations, and outline the main problems that ensued from these, concentrating – albeit not exclusively – on the period around 1680-1720. To do so, both for the Dutch and, indeed, the Persian side of the bargain, I have studied mostly VOC sources, that are invaluable if only because the Safavid state archives were largely destroyed during the Afghan

occupation of Isfahan in 1722. Also, it seems that even before that, record keeping at the Savafid court was sloppy, to say the least.¹⁴ Yet while relying on Company documents,¹⁵ mainly, I yet try to look at things from a Persian perspective, too. Indeed, I will first analyse the reasons why the shahs, their court and their central administration accepted the presence of the Company in their lands, precisely because without their consent there would have been no Persian-Dutch history in the first place.

Through the court's eyes: power and the representation of power

The Safavid family derived its name from a certain fourteenth-century sheikh from Ardebil, Safi, who pretended to descend from the martyred imams of Shiite Islam: Ali, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatma, their sons Hassan and Hussayn and their progeny up till the twelfth imam, who had gone into hiding in the ninth century. In 1499, the great-grandson of Safi, Ishmail, claiming to be the representative on earth of the 'Hidden Imam', who was yet to return, started his conquest of present-day Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, thus recreating part of the old Persian empire and founding a new dynasty. In Europe, he and his descendants were referred to as the 'Grand Sophy', alongside the 'Grand Turk' and the 'Grand Mogul'. In Persia, he was, of course, shah-in-shah, king of kings. The VOC-officials called him 'coninck' in their letters to the governor-general, but sometimes also addressed him as 'keyser'. Thus, they honoured his power, which, however, they often characterized as despotic and cruel. Meanwhile, they seem to not have understood the religious dimension of his authority.¹⁶

The Safavid dynasty ruled an empire that was almost totally agrarian: consequently, their history is one of constant competition with older, tribal-based elites for the possession of, or at least the fiscal control over the produce of the land.¹⁷ Greatly extending his own estates and increasing his income in order to create a standing army, Shah Abbas succeeded in significantly reducing, but certainly not in totally curbing the power of the chieftains of the various tribes who continued to rule some of the provinces.

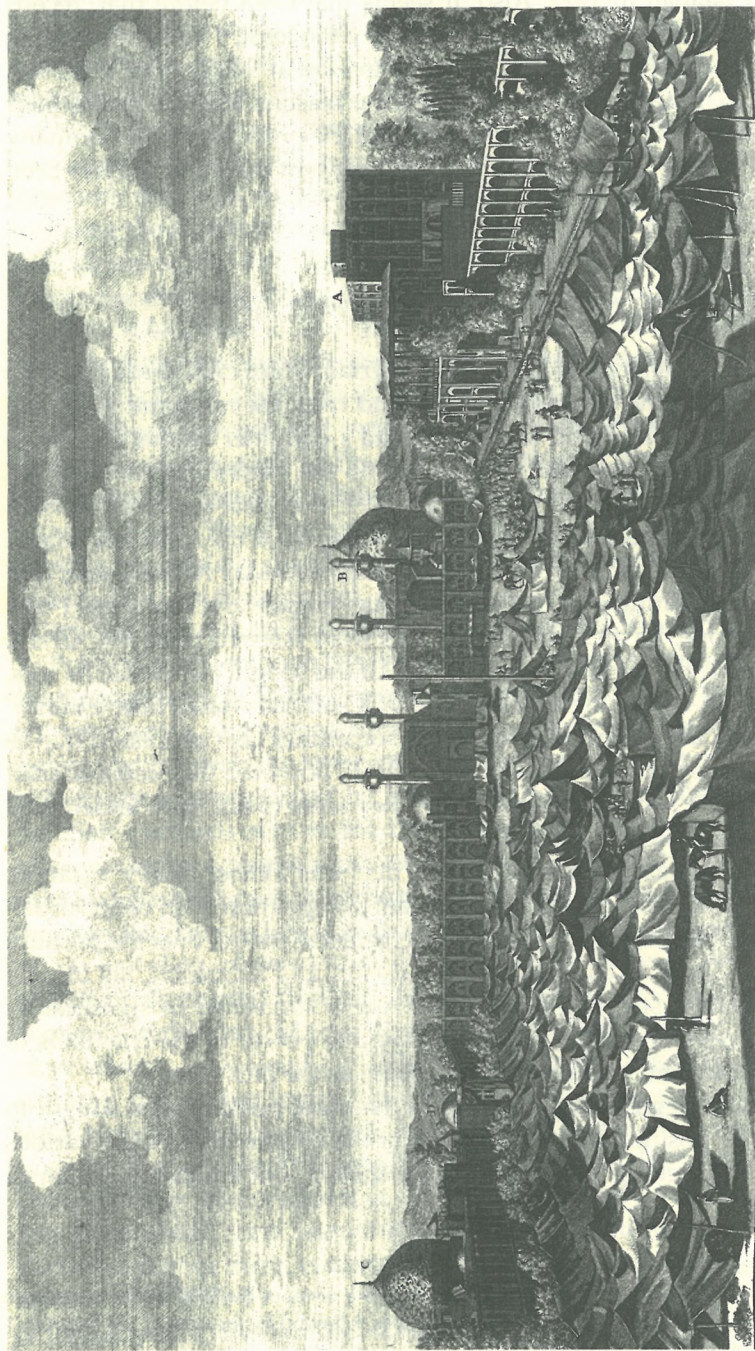
Besides the struggle of the shahs with the tribal nobility who sought to strengthen their position in the periphery of the empire, there were various other factors weakening Persia internally. Raised and educated – if at all

¹⁴ According to Dunlop 1930:xcii.

¹⁵ I mostly use the reports and letters of the governors-general of the VOC to the Gentlemen XVII, as published in: *Generale Missiven*, volume number, followed by the date of the letter(s).

¹⁶ For the background see Sabzavari 1990.

¹⁷ A valuable recent analysis that gives the background details is Floor 2000.



'De Mey-doon': the Majdan, or central square at Isfahan with, to the right, the main gate to the Safavid palace. In C. de Bruin, *Reizen over Moskoviën, door Persië en Indië*, plate 75. Amsterdam 1711.

– in the harem, many shahs came to the throne less than well prepared for their weighty tasks. Moreover, as the Ottoman seraglio, the Persian harem was a place of endless intrigues that spilled over into the domain of policy making, fuelling the faction strife that both characterized and weakened central government. Also, the Islamic clergy, though nominally in line with the shahs whose authority, based on their imam-status, they could not well challenge, always sought to increase their influence, both among the people and at court.

On top of these internal threats, the rulers of Persia, or their chief advisers and decision makers, faced external problems as well, the major one being, of course, the constant enmity between Shiite Persia and its western neighbour, the Sunnite Ottoman empire. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, almost no year went by without the two regional superpowers campaigning against each other. Less serious, perhaps, but nonetheless a threat was the arrival of European traders on the southern borders of Persia, from the early sixteenth century onwards. More precisely, in 1515 the Portuguese had challenged the authority of the shahs over their part of the Gulf coast, symbolized in the taking of the harbour-fortress of Hormuz, the key to the straits that led into the Gulf.

Because of all these problems, both internal and external, the shahs were definitely interested in relations with the VOC, though they must have known the representatives of the Company were more than simple traders and had an agenda of their own. Therefore, to the Persian court, 'managing' the Company was a complex game, with many variables.

The court well realized the VOC was not interested in favourable commercial conditions, only, but actually, precisely to ensure these, was after as much independence in coastal Persia as could be reasonably obtained, and financially and militarily handled. Maybe, the Persian monarchs of the later seventeenth century even were aware of the fact that elsewhere the Company's policy had resulted in the loss of power and, sometimes, of territory for various Asian princes. On the Coromandel Coast, the local rulers saw their sovereignty threatened by the Dutch, while, farther South, the emperors of Kandy were unable to prevent the VOC from taking over actual power in all their coastal lands.

Something similar happened to Persia, when, some twenty years after the beginning of its relations with the Dutch, outright war between the two broke out in 1645. Arguing that Isfahan did not honour its obligations and, moreover, was constantly harassing the Company's traders with heavy tolls, Governor-General Van Diemen and his council in Batavia decided to blockade the main Persian port, Bandar Abbas – 'the felicitous harbour of Abbas', which the Dutch usually called by its older name, Gamron and from which they themselves traded with the empire. The Dutch fleet also attacked and

occupied the small island of Khism that, with Hormuz, strategically controlled the Gulf entrance. In a sense, this episode illustrated the dilemma that so often faced the VOC in Asia. It had already been worded by the Company's officials in Surat, when in 1635 they talked about the role of Persian silk in the Company's intra-Asian trade. They wondered 'whether it was wise to foot the Company's trade on the ways of sovereign states, which never worry about losses, if they but can increase their reputation through warfare and do harm to their enemies [...] or if we should organize the affairs of our masters according to the rules of a merchant republic, that only seeks to increase its trade'.¹⁸

What would have been the consequences if, in 1645, the Heren XVII had backed up their representatives in Asia, is difficult to say. However, the gentlemen in Holland were furious. Nor in their own eyes, nor before the eyes of the world could they accept a situation in which, as they wrote, their servants acted like criminals in a country where they were present for commercial purposes only, and, hence, had to accept the conditions set out by the indigenous authorities, in this case, of course, the shah. The crisis made the XVII review their policy all over Asia, which resulted in the famous General Instruction of 1650, outlining and delimitating the position of the Company vis-à-vis the various local powers: trade on conditions determined by negotiations rather than anything resembling territorial imperialism was to be the basis of the VOC's presence on the coasts of the Indian Ocean and the Chinese Sea. Negotiations with Isfahan did indeed follow the incident. They took, however, seven years, and were concluded only when, in 1651-1652, ambassador Joan Cunaeus, after endless talks, achieved – well, certainly not what he had set out to achieve: free in- and export and duty-free trade in Persia itself. No, his mission ended with a new silk-contract, at, from the Dutch perspective, only slightly less unfavourable conditions.¹⁹

Their authority vindicated, the shahs could think about ways in which the Dutch merchants and the Company behind them might be used for Persian political purposes. As long as the Safavids maintained their power at home, there was little need to ask for support from abroad. However, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, rebellion broke out in the north-eastern province of Kandahar. This was nominally Mogul territory, but actually it was controlled by the fiercely independent Afghan tribes and consequently, since its conquest by Abbas II (reigned 1642-1666), in 1648, a problem area.

¹⁸ Dunlop 1930:533, no. 262, resolution of the VOC-council in Surat, 6-4-1635: 'ofte [...] geraetsaem ware, datt men des Compagnies negotie by een souvereine staet soude vergelycken, dewelcke op geen verlies van goet respect nemen, als maer daerby de reputatie van de oorlogen vermeerdert en hun vyanden gecrenckt worden [...] dan off men d'affairen van onse principaelen by een coopmansstaet soude ballanceeren, dewelcke alleenlijck trachten hun commertie te vergrooten.'

¹⁹ Hotz 1908; for Cunaeus's initial demands see pp. 155-7, for the final result see pp. 218-40.

Already in 1652, when Cunaeus was in Isfahan, the problems surrounding Kandahar became evident to the Dutch, if only because the royal treasurer harassed them continually with urgent questions for financial help to protect the city against the Mogul armies.²⁰ A pattern was set. During the reign of Shah Hussayn (reigned 1694-1722), we find his government repeatedly 'asking' the Company's representatives to assist them with loans to help pay for the campaigns against the Afghans. In the 1710's, the VOC's Isfahan chief consented to do so. Thus, the Company invested, albeit, at least according to Batavia, unwillingly, in a war that, in the end, led to the fall of the Safavids in 1722.

Already in 1717, the Dutch observed that the situation was becoming decidedly unsafe, what with order disappearing even from the streets of the capital itself. A year later, the governor-general informed his masters that Persia, 'this big colossus [whose court, in consequence of the long years of peace, has drowned itself in lust and luxury], is, since some time, being undermined by subaltern dukes, governors and others'.²¹ Decades of neglect of the government's standing army, Abbas's great achievement, made it a less than effective weapon – 'gering en saemgeraep', or: 'small and a rag-bag'. Consequently, chaos increased, with inevitable side effects also for the Company's trade: the production of wool fell,²² and sericulture was affected, too. Years of growing unrest followed. In 1721, the Dutch noted that the empire had been 'never as near to its downfall as now', also because 'the subjects are, everywhere, rebelling', while the court was unwilling or unable to do anything. In early Spring, 1722, the Afghan rebels laid siege to Isfahan. After eight months of great hardship for the inhabitants and, indeed, for the Company men as well,²³ the city surrendered the 22nd of October. Shah Hussayn, less concerned about his power and dignity than about a life of quiet and luxury, went into exile. Despite promises to the contrary, his family did not regain the throne.²⁴ In the turmoil that followed the fall of Isfahan, relations between the Safavid court and the Dutch company came to an end, almost to a year a century after they had been formally established.²⁵

²⁰ Hotz 1908:169, 212, 214, 259.

²¹ *Generale Missiven* VII:377, Governor-General Zwaardcroon to XVII, 6-12-1718 noted that: 'dat groote gevaarte (welkers hof door de langdurige vrede in wellust en pragt als verdrongen ligt), sedert eenigen tijd door de subalterne hartogen, gouverneurs ende anderen aen verscheide oorden is en nogh wert geinfesteerd'.

²² For instance *Generale Missiven* VII:316, Governor-General Zwaardcroon to XVII, 30-11-1717, wrote: 'als noyt so na aen de val', also because 'd' onderdanen daer alomme revolteren'.

²³ *Generale Missiven* VII:675, Governor-general Zwaardcroon to XVII, 3-12-1722.

²⁴ For the history of the period after the fall of Isfahan see Floor 1998.

²⁵ Despite the downfall of the Safavids, and the decreased importance of the Persian market, the VOC continued in Persia till the 1760's, mainly to try and cash the huge debts contracted by the Safavid government over the last decades of the seventeenth century, and retrieve the sums extorted from them by Shah Hussayn in the 1710s. See Jacobs 2000:125.

Besides having to worry about the problems on their north-eastern frontier, the shahs also were troubled by the necessity to maintain a balance between the many forces trying to control the Gulf, both indigenous – mostly, in fact, the merchant cities on the coast of the Arabian peninsula – and European.²⁶ After having used the English to recapture Hormuz from the Portuguese in 1622, Shah Abbas, from the beginning of Persian-Dutch relations onwards sought the Company's support, precisely to further reduce the influence of the Portuguese in the area. Every now and then, suggestions were made that the Company help Persia to drive the Portuguese from their strategic base at Muscat.²⁷ In the 1630's, this plan matured, when both the governor-general and his council and the court at Isfahan seemed ready to invest men and money.²⁸ Communications with Holland always being problematic, it happened that the governor-general wrote to the XVII about the execution of these plans on 28 December, 1636, while the XVII's letter telling him that he should do no such thing had been dispatched on 26 November. In the end, nothing came of the plan, because, in 1637, Isfahan intimated that Persia would not participate after all.²⁹ In 1650, the Portuguese lost Muscat, not to Persia or to the Company, but to local chieftains, who succeeded in capturing the city.

While Portuguese power was thus much reduced, the coastal Arabs – especially the new masters of Muscat, who had repeatedly sought to gain control over the Gulf – continued to harass the Safavid empire. In the 1690s, the Muscateers attacked Bandar Kung, on the pretext of wanting to punish the Portuguese merchants trading there. The Persian court did not accept this infringement of its sovereignty and mounted a counter-attack. Letters went to Batavia, to ask the VOC for help in ships or otherwise. The Company declined, adducing the war against France as a reason.³⁰ When, in 1696 and 1697, the situation deteriorated, the shah even offered to discharge the Company of its obligation to annually buy his silk if they would come to his aid. Governor-general and council consented to send some ships for the non-military assistance of the Persian fleet and army, and even would supply the court's general with arms – but expressly forbade Company men to stand with the Persian troops in any actual fighting situation.

In the following decades, the problems in the Gulf continued to vex

²⁶ Barendse 2002 gives a masterly analysis of trade conditions in the region, but is rather slight on Dutch-Persian relations.

²⁷ Compare Dunlop 1930:17, no. 17, P. van den Broecke to XVII, 16-3-1623.

²⁸ Dunlop 1930:548, no. 269, Overschie to XVII about the governor-general's orders, 15-12-1635. Dunlop 1930:600, no. 292, governor-general and council to the XVII, 28-12-1636. Dunlop 1930:597, no. 291, XVII to governor-general and council, 26-11-1636.

²⁹ Dunlop 1930:615, no. 297, Overschie to governor-general and council, 25-3-1637.

³⁰ *Generale missiven* V:743, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 3-11-1695.

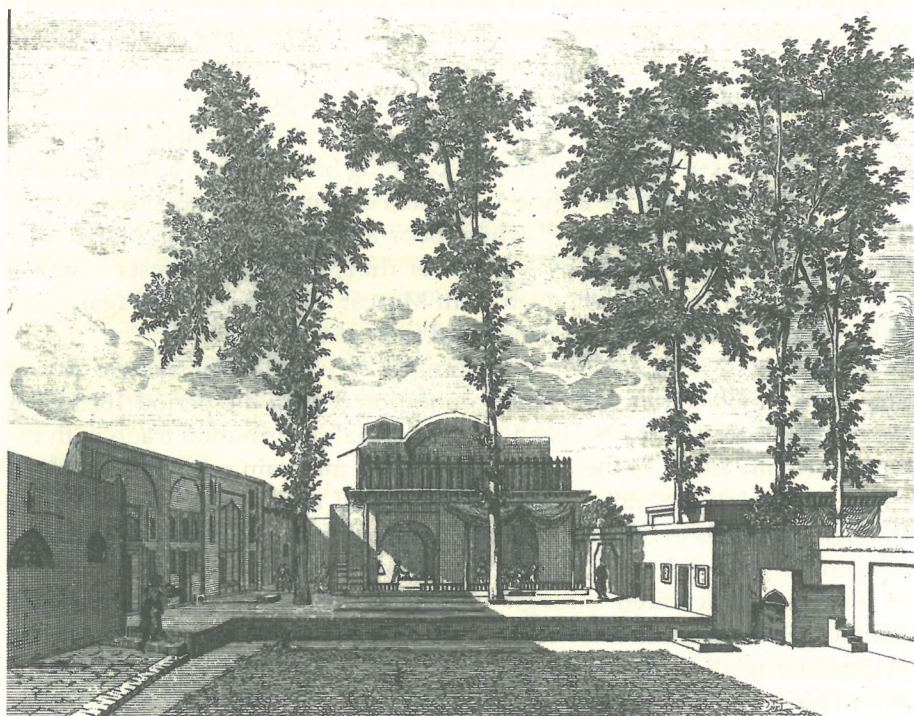
the court. Thus, in 1715, with Muscat attacking again, Isfahan renewed its request for VOC-ships to help combat these marauders. This request they then repeated each of the five following years. Though Company trade, too, was seriously hampered by the increasing chaos in the area, the authorities in Batavia now ordered their men in Persia not to comply with any of the court's wishes, arguing that their military involvement in Javanese affairs took all the arms and monies and ships that could be spared from trade. The Persian government, not willing to take no for an answer, stepped up pressure, which became apparent when, in 1717, Jan Josua Ketelaar arrived in Isfahan to negotiate the renewal of the capitulations – bringing Shah Hussayn six elephants as a gift. In 1718, albeit for a short time, the Persians even took possession of the Dutch factory in Gamron,³¹ where poor Ketelaar lay dying. No wonder that both court and Company – however different their interests – sighed with relief when, in 1720, the men from Muscat opened the Gulf again, and returned the islands they had conquered to Persia.

Obviously, it is impossible to determine to what extent Safavid power may have profited from the Dutch connection during the period 1623-1722. We never will be able to establish what financial contribution trade with the Dutch actually made to the court's capacity to maintain or increase its hold over the empire, the more so since so much of the monies involved went through the hands of officials who could not be trusted to actually deposit all or even the greater part of it in the royal coffers.

But money, acquired through tolls and other taxes, and the concrete military power it could buy was not the only reason why the Safavid shahs maintained relations with the Dutch. The power game also was played in other fields than war at home or abroad.

Even when the court did not ask for the VOC's actual support, it could use the simple fact of the presence of the Company as a weapon in its continuous struggle to keep the Gulf region in some sort of peace and its northern shores under Isfahan's control. Thus, it may well be Isfahan hoped the Dutch would help to maintain a balance of power with the other European states that traded in the region, England and France. However, it seems to me that – certainly after the death of Abbas I – there is little evidence of any conscious, long-term Gulf-policy on the Persians' part; this was precluded first of all by the very instability of the situation at the centre of the realm, where grand vizirs were as easily named as fired and, often, killed. Moreover, as changes in the shah's views or in the balance of power at court also affected nominations to the main government positions in the southern provinces, not even regional politics were conducted according to much of a plan. Besides, knowing how uncertain their term of office was, most men who were sent there to

³¹ *Generale Missiven* VII:377, Governor-General Zwaardecroon to XVII, 6-12-1718.



'Wooninge van de Maetschappye', the VOC lodge at Isfahan. In C. de Bruin, *Reizen over Moskoviën, door Persië en Indië*, plate 107. Amsterdam 1711.

represent the shah did their best to make hay while the sun shone, even if this meant pursuing a policy of their own rather than adhering to the Isfahan-line which, if anything, was less than clear.

There were more intangible ways in which the shahs used the VOC to maintain or enlarge their power. One of these was gathering information from the Company or other foreigners. Indeed, Abbas's policy, which brought so many European merchants and, moreover, Christian missionaries to Persia, certainly helped not only to gain him a reputation for being a 'great prince' – sought out by men from all over the earth, and tolerant to boot – but also considerably widened his scope: these foreigners were valuable contacts with the wider world, and sources of knowledge about it as well. Though Abbas's successors were, on the main, weak rulers, who seem to have taken little direct interest in the business of state, those who governed Persia in their place did know the value of intelligence. Thus, every now and then, one hears of this or that senior official asking the Dutch about news from beyond the Persian border: from the Ottoman capital, or from the capitals of Europe where, of course, decisions were taken that might directly or indirectly affect the fate of Persia. Yet again, here, too, there seems to have been no conscious policy, that made intelligence gathering in the milieu of the foreign companies and, of course, the foreign mission posts into a constant bureaucratic concern. In the end, the Safavid government does not seem to have had any clear idea of the structure of the European states, or of the rules by which they played their power game, whether in Europe or in Asia.

Obviously, for the Dutch and other traders, it was pleasant to be able to live and work in a cosmopolitan and relatively tolerant state – even though Christianity gained little foothold in Persia. In 1629, ambassador Smid succinctly summarized the situation. Writing about the various religious orders, he noted: 'they have founded monasteries, but do not reap any fruits, because the Persians are stupid and superstitious people'.³² No great progress was made in the following decades. Moreover, as I indicated previously, the Dutch were forbidden to build churches. Nevertheless, the Islamic clergy thought the royal attitude towards the Christians too indulgent, still. This increased tension between the shahs and the religious establishment, which weakened the regime. The changes became apparent when, in the early eighteenth century, the court, urged by the sheikh-ul-islam, forced the Company to discharge all their Islamic staff and employ Armenian Christians instead.³³

Even more intangible but certainly of no little concern to the court was the

³² Smid's report in Dunlop 1930:742-3: 'hebben bequame cloosters gesticht, doch [oogsten] aldaer geen vruchten, alsoo de Persiaenen botte superstitieuse menschen sijn'.

³³ *Generale Missiven* VII:156-57, Governor-General Van Swoll to XVII, 18-2-1715.

value of the Company as an element in the representation of power which, as all early modern monarchs understood, was as important as power itself. Representation was, indeed, a keyword in such policy as the Safavids had. They took great care of the magnificence of their personal appearance as well as of their palaces and of the ceremony and ritual that took place therein.

During the reign of Abbas especially, the Persian court was widely famous for its splendour; even foreign observers wrote about it, and among those not only men who stood to gain from such sycophancy. Having established Isfahan as his magnificent new capital – Smid wrote the XVII this had been done with the help of thousands of Greek-Christian and Jewish families³⁴ – Abbas gathered there poets, scholars and artists of all sorts, who in their various ways helped to add lustre to his court, and, thus, his name and reign.³⁵ He appreciated contributions from foreigners as well. Thus, he employed the otherwise unknown painter Jan Lucasz van Hasselt, who later claimed he had been greatly esteemed by the shah. Indeed, in 1626, Abbas asked him to return to Holland as companion of ambassador Musa Beg. In 1629, Abbas's successor, Safi I, giving Van Hasselt glowing credentials, sent him to the Republic again, now to act as Persia's ambassador himself.³⁶ During the reign of Abbas II, the Dutch diamond cutter Huybert Bufkens – or Hubregt Buffkens – worked for the shah and his court, and helped facilitate the embassy of Joan Cunaeus in 1651-1652.³⁷ In the same years, one Claes worked as the shah's goldsmith. Moreover, from 1651 to 1656, the artist Philip Angel stood in the shah's high favour, even teaching him to paint; meanwhile, he also acted as the Company's Isfahan agent.³⁸

In the end, the continuous and even increasing expenditure on courtly culture, such as new palaces and parties lasting for many days, was, at least according to the Dutch, one of the factors contributing to the downfall of the dynasty.³⁹ Snide remarks such as the one about Shah Hussayn's 'boundless lust for building' – the embellishment of the town of Farrahabad – pepper the letters of the early eighteenth century.⁴⁰

To show their royal largesse, both to impress the foreigners and their own population, the shahs doled out considerable gifts especially to official visitors, such as VOC-ambassadors travelling to Isfahan. However, these usually

³⁴ Smid's report in Dunlop 1930:739.

³⁵ For the background see Welch 1973.

³⁶ Van Hasselt's credentials are inserted in the resolutions of the States General of 15-6-1630, Dunlop 1930:721-2.

³⁷ For Bufkens see Hotz 1908:133-4, 312.

³⁸ Details about these men are found in Leupe 1873:260-6.

³⁹ *Generale Missiven* VII:156, 317, Governor-General Van Swoll to XVII, 18-2-1715, 30-11-1717.

⁴⁰ For instance *Generale Missiven* VII:253, Governor-General Van Swoll to XVII, 30-11-1716: 'onmatige timmersugt tot Pharabaat'.

had to be balanced by Dutch counter-gifts, to a value that often was the same as, or even superior to that of the royal generosity.⁴¹ Moreover, the Persian rulers also expected their more official foreign visitors to contribute to the splendour of their regime. Thus, the VOC-officials were obliged to attend the annual ceremonies of No-Ruz, the Persian New Year, in all their finery and to bring gifts as well.⁴² Specific occasions could be even more costly. When, in 1636, Shah Safi returned triumphantly from his campaign against the Turks, having recaptured the town of Erewan, the Isfahan office of the Company erected a magnificent triumphal arch and staged a huge celebration. But while this increased their favour with the monarch – which also helped them in their competition with the English, or so they thought – expenses amounted to some 20% of the net profit of trade with Persia during that year.⁴³

Indeed, anyone approaching the court, wanting to do business with it, did well to show a proper reverence, suitably expressed in the magnificence of clothes and other forms of representation and, most of all, of occasional gifts and more structural donations. As is well known, gift giving was a major element in the social and power structures of Asia and, hence, in the policies of Asian courts. Right from the start, the Dutch were given to understand the importance of properly regaling the shah and, of course, a host of major and minor officials down the command chain, insofar as the VOC thought they might further its cause.

The Company soon discovered that the costs of these gifts – especially the presents that always should be brought by an embassy – and of the donations, which had to be given on an almost regular, not to say annual basis, were onerous indeed, weighing heavily on business profits. Already in 1633, Brouwer wrote to the XVII: ‘all reasons given to us from here [by the VOC-director in Persia] are none other than that the Persian pump and circumstance inevitably result in this useless expenditure; but because it serves to get into the good graces of the king and the grandees, it cannot be avoided’.⁴⁴ No wonder some VOC-officials asked whether it really was all worth its while.

The incessant demand for outlandish objects, too, resulted from the court’s wish to display its power. Thus, the Company bought ‘exceptional spyglasses, spectacles and other curiously ground lenses that show strange images’ for the shah. The grand vizir got his Rhine wine and ‘extraordinar-

⁴¹ For instance *Generale Missiven* VII:317, Governor-General Van Swoll to XVII, 30-11-1717.

⁴² For instance Hotz 1908:145.

⁴³ Dunlop 1930:617, no. 297, Overschie to governor-general and council, 25-3-1637.

⁴⁴ *Generale Missiven* I:381, Governor-General Brouwer to XVII, 15-8-1633: ‘alle redenen, die ons hiervan werden gegeven [by the VOC-opperhoofd in Persia], zijn niet anders, dan dat de Persiaensche pracht soodanige ongelden onmijdelijcken veroorsaecken; ende om bij den Coninck en de groote gesien te werden, niet anders en can geschieden’.

ily big, short-haired dogs', and many other items that all had to be brought in from Europe.⁴⁵ Also, there were such exotic things as Japanese lacquerware and birds of paradise⁴⁶ or, on one occasion, the four little elephants that, at considerable cost and trouble, had to be hunted in other parts of Asia and shipped to Persia.⁴⁷ Obviously, all the animals and objects thus acquired, whether valuable or simply strange, besides, perhaps, to give pleasure, served to enhance the public status of their new possessors. Sometimes, the court even asked the Company to transport Persian curio dealers to Europe, in order that they might do their own 'opcoop van eenige rareyten voor Sijne Mayesteijt'⁴⁸: they would go shopping to find some rare items for the shah.

The representation of power did take other forms as well. For example, the shahs every now and then asked the Company for the use of one of its ships in order to convey Persian ambassadors to some foreign court – mostly on the Indian subcontinent, but sometimes as far as Siam.⁴⁹ The Dutch authorities were less than happy with these requests, which always entailed a considerable financial outlay and, of course, might lead to political or at least diplomatic entanglements that they would rather avoid.

Another way the shahs found use for the Dutch was by asking them to transport pilgrims to the holy cities on the Red Sea, for though Shiite, most Persians did, of course, try to obey the Prophet's wish that they should visit Mecca and Medina. As defenders of the faithful, the shahs could not but support their subjects in their pious plans. By asking the Dutch to act as pilgrim shippers, they increased their own religious authority.

Through the Company's eyes: trade on a shoestring or by a silk thread?

Obviously, the reasons that brought the Dutch to Persia were not ones of power and representation, but of commerce. Yet, the Persians did not engage in sea trade, the VOC officials always noted, somewhat amazed: 'Bij den Persiaenen wort de zee niet gefrequeenteert':⁵⁰ the Persians were not keen seafarers. One of the reasons was the great scarcity of timber throughout the better part of the realm, which almost prohibited extensive shipbuilding.

⁴⁵ *Generale Missiven* II:766, Governor-General Maetsuyker to XVII, 7-11-1654: 'raare verrekijkers, neusbrillen en andere curieuse geslepen glazen, die vreemde vertooningen geven' and 'extraordinarie groote doggens'.

⁴⁶ For a list of gifts see Hotz 1908:146.

⁴⁷ *Generale Missiven* VII:120, 155, Governor-General Van Swoll to XVII, 26-11-1714, 18-2-1715.

⁴⁸ *Generale Missiven* II:766, Governor-General Maetsuyker to XVII, 7-11-1654.

⁴⁹ For instance *Generale Missiven* V:84, Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 28-2-1687.

⁵⁰ *Generale Missiven* I:563, Governor-General Van Diemen to XVII, 28-12-1636.

The other was, of course, that, as in many states of Europe, in Persia, too, the great noble families, who controlled the country's main wealth, land, were traditionally not inclined to sully their hands with trade. Yet, it would be silly to say that, therefore, the only reasons for the Isfahan court to deal with the Dutch were vaguely geo-political or representational.

Though they did not normally trade themselves, this by no means meant the Persian court and the regional elites were not interested in overseas trade; on the contrary: many of the luxuries they craved – such as, for instance, spices and sugar – could not be otherwise obtained. Moreover, the centralizing policies of the Safavids cost a huge amount of money. Part of it was obtained, of course, from taxes but as in many European states their collection was less than reliable and, moreover, much of the profits did not reach the centre, Isfahan. Meanwhile, an increasing part of the royal revenue came from the shahs' private domains – which Abbas, like his European counterparts in the same position, had hugely extended. Still, any other source of income was definitely welcome. Thus, siphoning off part of the profits of the tolls levied in the harbours on the Gulf coast seemed a good idea – hence the foundation of Bandar Abbas –, especially when combined with the state monopolization of products which were particularly cherished by foreign traders; here again, the Persian rulers acted as most of their Asian and, for that matter, European colleagues did. All this was quite evident to the Company: the shah made much money from the duties levied at Bandar Abbas/Gamron and other ports and, moreover, precisely through the silk monopoly, was perhaps the country's major merchant.⁵¹

In order to know what moved the VOC to establish relations with Persia, one can do no better than quote Governor-General Coen. In 1627, prior to sending Smid to Isfahan, he writes to the Company directors in Amsterdam that he hopes 'God will grant the Company that it may retain peaceful trade in Persia for a long period, because it is one of the most obvious pillars upon which its revenue can be founded in a secure way'.⁵² Bringing to Persia those Dutch or other European wares that could be easily shipped and profitably sold in the East made, of course, sense but by and large these were few. Far more money could be made from importing and exporting Asian products to and from Persia. Consequently, the Persian market soon was part of the network of the Company's intra-Asian trade, without which, of course, the VOC would not have survived for long. Hence, the Dutch shipped to Persia whatever it felt was saleable there – most important a variety of textiles from the

⁵¹ *Generale Missiven* II:419, Governor-General Reniers to XVII, 10-12-1650.

⁵² Dunlop 1930:218, no. 116, Governor-General Coen to XVII, 9-11-1627: 'God geve, de Compagnie lange een vredigen handel in Persia [sal] behouden, also 't een van de apparentste columnen is daerop 't inlandsch funds sal cunnen [...] gestabileert werden'.

Indian subcontinent, as well as large quantities of sugar and spices from all over Asia and camphor and copper from Japan. Studying the sales' value of the Company's imports, one may conclude that it was considerable indeed.

Of course, the VOC took from the Safavid empire whatever could be marketed elsewhere. Two things, however, stood out because, in a sense, they were the main reason for bothering with Persia in the first place. Of course, there was bullion, the one thing the Company could ill afford to import from Europe and always hoped to gain at cheaper rates in the various markets of Asia precisely through the profits it made through its intra-Asian trade. Persia was one of the sources for precious metals – much of its gold ducats came to the country through its commerce with Russia and the eastern Mediterranean – but the VOC soon found that most coins were worth less than their surface value, due to the Persian government's policy of continual debasement. Yet, the VOC could not afford to let this opportunity lie.

Insolubly linked to this necessity, was the silk trade,⁵³ which, according to the Dutch, was as profitable to the Persians as to themselves, the internal market for silk not being a seller's one. But whatever the profits that could be made from silk, the VOC's directors warned their representatives not to pay for it in cash – certainly not in cash that had been loaned at high local interest – but with the revenue from its imports.⁵⁴

For the Company, the practice of trade in Persia did not differ much from what they experienced in other Asian states. Life in the four towns where they kept an establishment – Gamron, Kirman, Shiraz and Isfahan – was not always easy for the dozen or so Dutchmen who annually manned these factories. Especially Gamron was a dismal place, with temperatures in summer rising to such extremes that the pitch started dripping from the ships' seams, and sealing wax melted on the desks. Trade itself hinged upon the Company's good relations with a host of minor and major officials, from local tax collectors and customs' officials to the grand vizir. Each and all of them had to be continually plied with gifts. They also noted that, due to incessant intrigues and changes at court, many of these officials were less than certain of the undisturbed enjoyment of their positions; consequently, they would use their insecure period of office to try and get as much money as possible from the favours they could distribute – mostly the tasks they had to perform anyhow. Hence, the Company was continuously beset with polite – or outright forceful – demands for more donations. In order to at least know who was really important and could not be slighted, and who could, perhaps, be kept at bay a little, the VOC's officials in Persia had to

⁵³ Far more details than can be given here, are provided in the important analysis by Matthee 1999.

⁵⁴ For instance Dunlop 1930:597 no. 291, XVII to governor-general and council, 26-11-1636.

keep themselves informed of the rise into and the fall from favour of persons at court, in Isfahan – beginning, of course, with the grand vizir, the ‘rijksvertrouder’, and the nazir, the royal treasurer, who acted as the representative of the shah in all matters concerning the silk monopoly. When negotiations of real importance took place – such as the ones Cunaeus conducted in 1651-1652 to end the hostilities that had begun in 1645 – also the chief eunuch, the chief of the royal bodyguard and a host of other officers-of-state had to be ‘bribed’. Obviously, the Dutch were loath to part with the considerable sums involved. Their reports show real rage when they were given to understand that no less than 10% of the value of their already expensive gifts to the shah himself should be given to his chief door keeper; they called it: ‘a custom that does not have its like or, at least, is unheard of in Europe’.⁵⁵

To keep track of the vicissitudes of the governors of the southern region and their subordinates was equally important. For example, the Dutch were shocked when they realized what happened to the very influential ‘hertogh’ – the khan – of the province of Shiraz, whom they considered one of their well-wishers. In 1633, this Imam Quli Khan and his children were suddenly taken prisoner; they were blinded, or maimed in other ways, and in the end decapitated. Their heads were shown during a big banquet given by Shah Safi, and at which the one surviving son of the family was present. At the same time, other provincial governors were executed, too. The VOC-representative in Persia, Nicolaas Overschie, who reported on the matter to the Company directors in Amsterdam, realized the members of this family as well as the other officials had become too powerful and wealthy – and thus a threat to the court.⁵⁶ Besides being genuinely dismayed, the Company men also realized how uncertain their agreements with such high officials could be. In this specific case this became clear even as late as 1652. During his negotiations with the grand vizir, Cunaeus showed him the letters that Imam Khan had written in the early 1630s to protect the Dutch from unreasonable financial demands by local officials. The ‘rijksvertrouder’ then said such documents could not be honoured at all, for the late Imam Khan might have been ‘door geschenken ten schade van ‘t conincrijk daertoe [...] beweegt wesen’;⁵⁷ or: gifts might have induced him to thus act in a way detrimental to the realm.

Thus, daily trade was no simple matter of buying and selling on a free market, but involved some highly complex network management, that was both time and money consuming. Meanwhile, almost from the start, problems arose between the court and the Company precisely about the two main

⁵⁵ Hotz 1908:269: ‘een gebruyck dat geen weerga heeft off ten minste onder de Europeanen ongehoort’.

⁵⁶ Dunlop 1930:423-4, no. 222, Overschie to XVII, 8-5-1633.

⁵⁷ Hotz 1908:172-3.

fields of trade. Throughout the period, the Company spent a lot of time finding the ways and means to acquire and then export Persian gold and silver. The sources suggest that the court almost constantly tried to make good use of the cash weakness of the VOC, mostly by asking them to pay heavy duties for all monies exported,⁵⁸ and sometimes expressly forbidding any transfer of bullion to the Company's factory at Bandar Abbas. Due to the Persian policy of constant devaluation – if not outright falsification – the Company officials often asked themselves whether the trouble involved outweighed the less than heavy coins they were able to lay hands on.

As to silk, after a few decades of trading with Persia the Company realized it was not the source of profit it had been in the 1620s. By the 1650s, prices in Persia had gone up, and, due to imports from other silk-producing areas, sales profits in Europe had dramatically fallen. Yet, the VOC had to continue buying Persian silk, and, moreover, to do so through the royal monopoly. A refusal surely would have resulted in their expulsion from the realm. This would rob them of both the profits from cheap bullion – the 'gold for goods' balance⁵⁹ – and those from the imports of spices and sugar, which were continuously growing.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the Company did know the shahs were less than able – or, sometimes, willing – to annually provide them with the amount of silk they themselves had stipulated in the contracts – some 0.12 million pounds in 1652. They also knew the reasons why. These were manifold. Sometimes, the annual yield of raw silk simply was not enough to gather the necessary consignments, due to, among other reasons, diseases among the silkworms, or in the plants they fed upon, or to local administrative or political problems in the silk districts. Also, when silk was scarce, the market price rose above the sum set beforehand in the multi-annual Dutch contract.

Obviously, this inconvenienced the court vis-à-vis the Company: while the VOC would then insist on buying the silk at the set value, the shah might reason he was better off selling it to another party on the free market. His officials then would procrastinate, either trying to fob off the Company with a smaller amount, or trying to get them to pay a higher price. Often, the Company simply did not receive its consignment, or had to accept paying more – which they sometimes tried to avoid by bribing the very officials involved in upholding the royal monopoly. The VOC, on the other hand, soon found the silk contract was a restrictive and troublesome agreement as well,

⁵⁸ For instance *Generale Missiven* VII:376, Governor-general Zwaardecroon to XVII, 6-12-1718.

⁵⁹ The emphasis on this exchange changed through the Company's history, as has been explained by Gaastra 1976.

⁶⁰ By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the VOC imported some 500,000 pounds of spices and some 1,500,000 pounds of sugar. See Jacobs 2000:123 and her Table 18.

for these very same reasons: when the court did not honour its obligations, their silk dealings in Europe were jeopardized; if they had to pay too high a price, their profits – already falling – were totally spoiled. Moreover, when, as happened sometimes, production of silk was abundant, and the shah did chose to honour his agreement, the Dutch might find they had to buy at the agreed price while, on the open market, silk was available much cheaper.

Despite all these problems the Persian court, juggling the monopoly as it saw fit, tried to maintain the contract situation, for even though it might not yield a profit when circumstances occurred such as those outlined above, the contract always was a very visible means to express its power towards the foreigners. In fact, the contract was their perpetual weapon against the Dutch as the Company's overall trade in Persia hinged on it: the VOC's licence to export bullion and to buy and sell other products without paying a heavy amount of tolls and other taxes had been made conditional on its acceptance of these silken conditions. The dramatic episode of 1645, when the Dutch threatened Persia's territorial integrity by occupying Bandar Abbas and the island of Khism, represented a first attempt to effectively break the royal monopoly, as the VOC men wanted to gain the right to freely trade in silk all over the empire, and export it without paying customs duties. However, as I indicated above, the Company's central management thought this action far too dangerous, and even illegal.

Nevertheless, in 1684, another generation of VOC-officials again felt the contract to be too irksome.⁶¹ The Company repeated its action of 1645: it decided to temporarily detain all 'Moorse schepen' carrying goods for Persian merchants, 'hoping that the complaints which this would cause, if brought to court by the interested parties, would make the king realize he would have to look into our business and demands himself, or at least specifically appoint commissars to do so'.⁶² This policy enraged the court. But Batavia decided to play for high stakes. They moved the Gamron-staff onto their ships, and again occupied Khism. It was then that the court asked for a negotiator. To show their willingness to return to normalcy, the VOC-men evacuated the island.⁶³ However, nothing happened. In 1686, the governor-general and his council ordered that products destined for Gamron were not to be sold, there, and threatened to dismantle their establishments in Persia altogether.⁶⁴

⁶¹ As clearly stated in *Generale Missiven* IV:773, by Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 12-2-1685.

⁶² *Generale Missiven* IV:741-2, Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 30-11-1684: 'op hoope dat de klagten daarover, door de geïntresseerden ten hove gebracht wesende, den Coninck soudén doen omsien en onse saecken en pretentiën selven examineren off ten minstens door expressen commissarissen sulx te laten doen'.

⁶³ *Generale Missiven* IV:826, Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 11-12-1685.

⁶⁴ *Generale Missiven* V:63, Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 13-12-1686.

In 1688, they wrote to the XVII that the very slowness of the negotiations showed the use of arms did not, in fact, impress the court: the Company's presence in Persia depended on its acceptance of the royal monopoly: '*van 's Compagnies magt te spreeken en te dreygen [kwam in] grooten handel-rijcken [such as Persia] geheel niet te passe*',⁶⁵ or: in such great empires it did not behove to speak about the Company's power and use it as a threat. For years, things dragged on. In 1691, a formal ambassador was sent, Joan van Leenen. He boldly asked for the annulment of the silk contract, freedom of customs' duties and the renewal of all old privileges.⁶⁶ However, he soon had to make concessions – as had the Persians, who agreed that though they would not abolish the contract, they would accept the annual amount of silk to be bought at a lower price. The Dutch were not satisfied. All these years, there were VOC-servants who favoured a military option, including a blockade of the Gulf – but the Council of the Indies reasoned this was too expensive and would enrage both other European powers trading in the region, and the Indian merchants with their important Persian interests.⁶⁷ Others argued the Company would be better off if the contract were broken even if this meant it had to pay heavy duties and other tolls for all in- and exports. Meanwhile, the court often did not force the annual silk consignment on the Company, sometimes because it could sell more profitably elsewhere. But though this was a relief, the insecurity of the situation was intolerable.

In the end, the XVII and Batavia argued it was only the contract that gave the Company anything remotely resembling a secure foothold in the Safavid empire: all other trade depended on the goodwill that accepting the royal silk monopoly realized both at court and with all subordinate officials involved.⁶⁸ Moreover, the Council of the Indies now reasoned that its imports into Persia were, in a sense, far more profitably paid for by the acquisition of silk, which, despite stiff competition within the market, could still be traded in Europe, than with the debased Persian coins that by now were considered no good either in Asia or in Europe.⁶⁹ To free themselves of the continual harassment – and the paying of ever larger bribes – the differences finally were patched up in 1696, with the Company agreeing to a new silk contract that did not materially alter the previous conditions they so much had tried to change.⁷⁰ Thus, from the Dutch perspective, trade with Persia continued to hang by a silk thread, indeed.

⁶⁵ *Generale Missiven* V:232, Governor-General Camphuys to XVII, 27-12-1688.

⁶⁶ *Generale Missiven* V:485-6, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 31-1-1692.

⁶⁷ *Generale Missiven* V:557, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 11-12-1692.

⁶⁸ *Generale Missiven* V:704, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 30-11-1694.

⁶⁹ *Generale Missiven* V:706, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 30-11-1694.

⁷⁰ *Generale Missiven* V:810, Governor-General Van Outhoorn to XVII, 19-1-1697.

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